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S E R M O N

Preached before the

S O C I E T Y

F O R

Reformation of MANNERS,

A T

ST. JAMES'S, CLERKENWELL,

O N

MONDAY, JULY 7. 1760.

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By GEORGE DOWNING, M. A.

Curate of Lewisham, in Kent; and
Chaplain to the Right Hon. the Earl of Dartmouth.

Published at the Request of the SOCIETY.

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Reformation of Manners

ST. JAMES'S, LONDON



GEORGE DOWNING, M.A.

Chapter to the Right Hon. the Earl of Dartmouth
 House of Lords, in Room: 1800

Published at the Request of the Society

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TO THE
GENTLEMEN
OF THE
SOCIETY
FOR
Reformation of Manners,

THIS DISCOURSE
(made public at their REQUEST)

Is INSCRIBED

By their obedient,

Humble servant,

G. D.



TO THE
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LONDON

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A
S E R M O N, &c.

St. M A R K viii. 34.

And when He had called the people unto him, with his disciples also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

THE disciples, it seems, did not as yet understand the design of our Lord's coming upon earth, nor were thoroughly instructed concerning the nature of that kingdom of his, which was to be set up amongst men: They seem hitherto to have looked for a kingdom that was to come *with observation*, that was to appear with outward pomp and grandeur, and that the Prince of this kingdom, instead of ministring, and giving

ing his life a ransom for many, was to be ministered unto : Accordingly we are told in the verses preceding the text, that when our Lord began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, (as it is added in St. Matthew's gospel) *Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.* But when our Lord had turned about, and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, *Get thee behind me, satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men* — thou considerest not, that I cannot otherwise promote the glory of God in the salvation of mankind, than by my own personal sufferings and death; and thou thyself also wouldst enter into happiness and glory, without enduring the cross.

From whence our Lord took occasion to instruct them more fully concerning the *spiritual* nature of his kingdom. And
when

when he had called the people unto him, with his disciples also, he said unto them, *Whosoever will come after me, will be my true disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

The text leads us to inquire into these three particulars—

First, What it is for a man to *deny himself*:

Secondly, —to *take up his cross*: and

Thirdly, —to *follow Christ*.

I will consider each of these in its order. —And may the *Spirit* of truth be with us, and imprint upon our hearts, whatsoever shall be spoken agreeable to the *Word* of truth!

First then, Let us consider, What it is for a man to *deny himself*.

1st, A man, who would be a disciple of Christ, must renounce his own *Wisdom*.

Let

Let me not be mistaken here, as if I said, for a man to be Christ's disciple, he must give up, or renounce his *Reason*: This is very far from what I mean; for Reason when it acts in subservience to divine Grace, and does not usurp over it, is certainly a wise and good guide: But what I would be understood to say, is clearly and fully expressed in the oracles of truth, as it is written, in the 3d chap. of the 1st epistle of St. Paul to the Corin. and at the 18th ver. *If any man seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.* A sense of our natural blindness, and ignorance concerning the things of God, is the first step towards true Wisdom. Jesus Christ came into the world to be the light thereof, and the greatest scholar stands as much in need of this divine light, as the most illiterate peasant; for every son of fallen Adam, however learned and wise he may be with regard to *secular* matters, is in a state of *spiritual* blindness, until the *sun of righteousness* arise upon him, and enlighten the darkness of his understanding.

If

If any man, saith the apostle, think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. The being wise in our own conceits, and exalting of human Reason above its proper sphere is utterly destructive of the spirit and temper, which the gospel prescribes. Our Lord tells us, that *except we become as little children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven* : As therefore in other things, so also in this particular, must we resemble them, in being of an humble, teachable temper, and, as having yet all to learn, in being contented to be taught by the word of God. *As new-born babes,* saith St. Peter, *desire the sincere milk of the word.* Every thought which exalteth itself against the *simplicity that is in Christ*, must be abased, and we must be brought to sit, with humble Mary, at the feet of Christ, to be taught of him, *what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.* The pride and self-sufficiency of the human Understanding is

ever ready to incline us *to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think ; that we are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, at the same time that we are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* Such is *naturally* the blindness of our understandings. But when the sinner comes to be *awakened*, and to see things *in the light of God*, he no longer leans to his own wisdom and understanding, but gladly embraces the truth as it is in Jesus, according as it is revealed in the written word of God : And though he find therein *some things hard to be understood*, and which his poor, finite capacity cannot comprehend ; this does not in the least shake or stagger his belief, because he knows, as the apostle speaks, that *the foolishness of God is wiser than men*, and that *Christ of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness.*

2dly then, The disciple of Christ denies himself, by renouncing not only his
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own wisdom, but his own *righteousness* also.

It is painful to flesh and blood, to the proud heart of the carnal man, to lay aside every claim, to give up every pretence of being justified by his works ; to be forced to come to God stripped of all merit, and pleading only the merits of Another for acceptance. Such preaching of *Christ crucified*, is indeed still *unto the Greeks*, those who are wise in their own eyes, *foolishness* : But *unto them which are called*, it is the highest wisdom. No sooner is a man thoroughly awakened to see and feel his lost, sinful, helpless state, but he gladly accepts of a *Redeemer's* righteousness. Can we indeed *practically* believe, that *the wrath of God* is revealed against all unrighteousness, and that He is of purer eyes than to behold the least *iniquity*, without displeasure, and yet entertain a thought that such polluted wretches, as we are, could be accepted on account of any thing we have done, or can do, by a God of such unspotted purity

purity, and inflexible justice? Surely it is impossible: The principle, which leads us to that excessive pride, must be an utter ignorance of ourselves, a practical disbelief of the wrath and justice of God, and a wretched thoughtlessness, at least, concerning the invaluable price of the blood of the Son of God, of God *himself* in the *human* nature, shed for sinners. Let us but once feel ourselves justly subject to the wrath of an offended God, and deserving to be cast for ever from his holy presence, we shall no longer stand upon terms of our own righteousness, but desire only, that God would *remember* our *sins* and our *iniquities* no more.

To be convinced of sin is the first step in the christian life: Without a deep and thorough conviction of the guilt and pollution of sin, and that we have thereby made God our enemy, and are become children of wrath, we cannot understand fully the necessity of Christ's being made a sacrifice for sin, neither can we set a due value upon the unsearchable riches of his re-

redeeming grace. A sense of our wretched sinfulness leads us to the *fountain opened for sin, and for uncleanness*; and the law, which is *weak thro' the flesh*, is our *school-master to bring us unto Christ*, that by virtue of his sinless obedience, and meritorious death, the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us. Accordingly, the awakened sinner, when he perceives himself under the sentence of condemnation, a captive to sin and satan, and exposed to all the storms of wrath, which must necessarily fall on him from an infinitely just and sin-avenging God, were he to remain unpardoned, hastens to be delivered. In the bitterness of his soul he cries out, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* He looks no longer to himself for matter of acceptance with God, for he knows that in him *dwelleth no good thing*, but is obedient to the call of him, who hath commanded, saying, *Look unto me, and be ye saved*. He looks unto Christ, and in him he finds salvation. By the faith which is
given

given him, he is saved from the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the tyranny of satan, the dread of hell, the guilt, the pollution, the power and dominion of sin. The faith, which assures him that Christ hath died for his sins, and made reconciliation with God for him, fills his heart with peace, and love to him, *who hath given himself for him*: And the sense of these free and unmerited favours so fully possesses his soul, that, with his wisdom and righteousness, he renounces also his *Will*.

But this consideration comes more properly under our second head of discourse, wherein it was proposed to enquire,

Secondly, what it is for the disciple of Christ to *take up his cross*.

The *cross*, under the Roman government, was the most servile and painful of all punishments; and *that*, whereunto the Lord Jesus was himself, for the sake of us sinners, to become obedient: Wherefore, in scripture-language, the *taking up the cross*

cross denotes the patiently submitting to any pains, troubles and calamities that God shall be pleased to lay upon us, and even to death itself, if we should be called to suffer for the sake of Christ.

The state of a christian is a state of warfare, he has no time therefore to be supine and slothful, but he must always watch, lest his enemies should get the advantage over him. He must *endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, the captain of his salvation*, who was made *perfect through sufferings*.

Indeed, unto the true believer, the yoke of Christ *is easy, and his burden light*; yea, he glories in the *cross of Christ, by which the world is crucified unto him, and he unto the world*. He is *crucified with Christ*: nevertheless he *lives*; yet not he, but Christ *liveth in him*: and the life which he lives *in the flesh*, he lives by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him. By the power of this victorious faith, he dies to sin and self, and lives to holiness and God. He has *learned in*
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whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content, and he can do all things thro' Christ who strengtheneth him. Is he in a state of poverty and distress? he remembers him, who, tho' he was rich, yet for his sake became poor and afflicted, and rejoices in the will of God towards him. Is he visited with sickness or pain of body? his soul prospers, and is happy still in him, who himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. Is he evil spoken of falsely for the name of Christ? he is comforted with the remembrance of that divine precept, which bids him rejoice in that day, yea, leap for joy. Do his neighbours and friends, and near relations forsake him on this account? he finds to his unspeakable comfort and refreshment, that when his father and his mother forsake him, the Lord taketh him up. Every state, wherein God places the christian, he finds that to be the best for him. Is he called to take up his cross, even to martyrdom? this is the crown of his rejoicing, that his life is hid with Christ in God,
and

and that *when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, then shall he also appear with him in glory.* The way of the *cross* is the way to *glory*: And by what means soever it pleases God to exercise the believer's faith and patience, he receives the dispensation with thankfulness, being fully assured that *all things shall work together for his good*; and that *all things are his*, whether prosperity or adversity, ease or pain, sickness or health, *life or death, or things present or things to come, that all are his*, because *he is Christ's, and Christ is God's.* Thus whosoever will be Christ's disciple, he must *deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow him.*

Thirdly then, What is it to *follow Christ*?

To follow Christ, is to be made like unto him, *to be conformed to his image, the having our old man crucified with him that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, but like as Christ was raised from the dead, by the*
C *glory*

glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. It is to imitate him, and to be holy, as He is holy, in all manner of conversation.

God hath chosen us in Christ, saith the apostle, *that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.* It is in vain therefore to talk of *being in Christ*, and at the same time to *live as without him* in the world. The true believer partakes of his spirit, and is endued with his holy tempers. He is one with Christ and Christ with him. As the branch partakes of the fatness of the vine, so does the christian of the fulness of Christ; for, saith St. John, *Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.* He is the source and fountain, from whence the believer derives every degree of life and holiness. Being united to Christ, *the true light*, he borrows from him that light, which he lets *so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father, who is in heaven.* Like unto his Saviour, he is meek, lowly of heart, gentle, and easy to be intreated: No inordinate affection,

or unruly passion is found to dwell in his breast, because the love of Christ hath expelled it. Walking in the steps of his Master, he goeth about doing good, having a zeal for God's glory, and for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. And there is nothing at any time so burthenome and painful to him, as to find a thought arising in his mind contrary to the holiness of God, and the honour of his blessed Master. The earnest language of his heart is, O that I could cease from sin, and never more offend him, who hath died for me, in thought, word, or deed! *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth his soul after the enjoyment of his God; and his longing soul crieth out, O when shall I come and appear before God?*

We see then, that the test of our being Christ's disciples, is *the denying ourselves, and taking up the cross, and following him.* But, according to this rule, how many are there, who profess the name of Christ, whose religion, in that day, when the
 hearts

hearts of all men shall be disclosed, will be found vain and fruitless?

By way therefore of applying what has been now delivered, I shall make a short address to two or three sorts of people.

And *first*, I would address those, who have the *form only*, and not the *power* of godliness.

Nothing short of *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*, can bring us into a state of Salvation, which repentance and faith imply a real conversion of the soul from sin to holiness, and a sincere acceptance of Christ, as our *only, yet all-sufficient* Saviour.

I will suppose that ye are free from scandalous sins, gross, enormous transgressions; your lives may be in the sight of men without blame — but are your hearts pure, and holy? Are they *athirst for God*? Do you hate and detest your sins, because they have made God your enemy, and were the occasion of Christ's sufferings? Or rather, so that ye do but ap-

appear fair to men, and bring not a reproach upon you by *outward* sins, are you not careless and indifferent about the sins of your *heart*? Have you ever so much as considered how exceeding hateful sin must be in the sight of God, which could not be otherwise expiated than by the precious blood of his only begotten Son? Have you ever felt a sense of God's displeasure, on account of sin, or been sensible of your meetness for eternal punishment? On the contrary; have all these heart-felt truths appeared to you as matter of fancy and delusion? Of this you may be assured, that however you may seem to yourselves to be bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, the Ax has never yet been laid to the root of the tree; you have never yet examined the ground of your hearts, nor seen how alienated they are from the life and power of godliness. You yet love sin, but would not appear sinful: Ye are more fearful perhaps of the shame that may arise from man, in committing what is wrong, than of the dis-

dishonour which is done to God. You may often take the name of Christ into your lips ; but do you love and reverence it with your hearts ? You may come to church ; but is it out of form and custom, or with a view of meeting God there, and confessing with all humility before him, that ye are miserable offenders, and rely only on the merits of Christ for pardon ? Probably you do not take the name of the Lord in vain ; you may abstain from all profaneness : but do you abstain from all detraction, and evil-speaking, *foolish talking and jesting* ? You do not, with the profligate, curse and blaspheme God ; but do you not murmur and repine against his providence, whenever any thing falls out contrary to your worldly schemes and interest ? How then can You be said to *deny yourselves, to take up your cross, and follow Christ* ? And yet without this, He himself assures you, ye cannot be *his disciples*.

But if the formal professor be not a disciple of Christ ; where *secondly* shall the
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ungodly and the *careless sinner* appear ?

Would to God, that you, who yet live in the wilful commission of your sins, were either frightened from it by the terrible threatenings denounced against you in the word of God : Or rather, sweetly led into the way of holiness and duty by the *constraining love* of Christ ! What ! shall Christ have died for you, and will ye trample upon his precious blood ? Shall he have purchased pardon for you, and will ye not accept it ? Shall he have bought a crown of never-fading glory for you, and will ye rather choose to have your portion with the devil and his angels, and dwell in everlasting misery ? Have pity upon your own souls. Let God be glorified in your Salvation. *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, barden not your hearts.* You know not whether you may have another offer of grace and mercy. *Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.* Can you warrant, if you go to bed this night with your sins *unpardoned*, that you shall not awake on the morrow in

in a dreadful eternity ? — And then it would be too late to knock : The door of mercy would be *for ever* shut. *Seek ye then the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near : Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon ;* He will pardon all your transgressions, be they ever so great and heinous, and give you free and plenteous redemption in the blood of Jesus, *the Lamb of GOD that taketh away the sins of the world.*

As for you, *Thirdly*, who have experienced *this redemption*, and are following *Christ*, let me exhort you, in one word, *to press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* Endeavour to love Christ better, and to keep up a more frequent intercourse with him ; and you will become more like him, and follow him more closely ; as it is natural for us to catch the ways and manners of Those whom we are fond of, and converse most with. Deny yourselves,
and

and take up your cross *daily*. Whatever occurrence befalls you throughout the day, however displeasing it may be to flesh and blood, receive it with thankfulness, as being the will of God concerning you. Desire not to choose for yourselves, but cast yourselves with calmness and resignation into the hands of your heavenly Father. Rejoice in every opportunity which is given you of crossing your own desires, and of sacrificing your wills to the will of God. Let this be the constant language of your hearts, as it was that of your Saviour, "*Father, not my will, but thine be done.*" Be ye followers of Others, as they follow Christ, but let him be your chief and *supreme* Example; and be ye conformed more and more to his divine image, rising higher and higher into his likeness, until ye come unto *the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*, until ye be filled with all the fulness of God.

Lastly, As for Those among you, Brethren, in particular, whose concern for the honour of God has inclined you to

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form

form yourselves into a Society, with a view of stemming the torrent of Profaneness and Iniquity, which, like a deluge, had well nigh overflown this great Metropolis, I heartily wish you good speed in the name of the Lord.

It is good, saith the Apostle, to be zealously affected always in a good thing: Were your care and Solitude engaged about the less material points of Religion, such as the *mere modes and forms* of Worship, Wherein surely men may differ, and yet be equally found in the Faith of Christ: One might fear, lest Zeal exerted to such a purpose should tend rather to the hindrance than the furtherance of the Gospel: But as your whole concern is employed upon the weightier matters thereof; How you may put a stop to Vice and Immorality, and recover the honour which is due to the Laws of God and of the Land; (wherein all good men of every persuasion are equally concerned) There is the greatest reason to expect, that the Interest of Religion will be promoted.

It

It appears indeed, that a considerable check has been already given to the progress of Vice in this city. That *Gaming*, and *Common-Swearing* have in some measure been restrained; and *the profanation of the Lord's-Day*, more especially, so far suppressed, that many persons in different parts of *London*, who were used (in defiance of the Laws) to expose their goods to sale, and exercise their *common* callings on that sacred Day, now sell no more, nor employ themselves about their *ordinary* business. As God hath therefore been pleased hitherto to prosper *your work and labour of love*; May we not humbly hope by the continuance of his blessing on your endeavours, and the ready concurrence of the Magistrates, that the cause of *Profaneness* and *Immorality* will daily lose ground, and *That of Virtue and Religion* become in the end happily triumphant? But, for the better promoting of your Design, It were to be wished, that Those, who have a zeal for Religion, but whom it may not suit to afford their *personal* assistance,

assistance, would at least contribute somewhat of their *Substance*, towards defraying those considerable, (yet necessary) expences, which *the Society* must be at in the management of *prosecutions*, the printing of *Extracts of Acts of Parliament*, and Tracts of a *religious* nature &c.

I would now add a word or two of exhortation, on occasion of our present meeting : But *the Rules* of your Society have so fully anticipated what I might have had to offer for this purpose, that I need do little more than just recall a few of *your own rules* to your remembrance——Your *first* Rule orders, that you “ begin and end with prayer to “ Almighty God for his direction and blessing”——You will do well indeed always to remember, that This is the hinge on which all your Success must turn; for, without the direction and blessing of *G O D*, the wisest counsels cannot but prove abortive, and the ablest undertakings fail. Your *seventh* Rule

Rule directs, that "None be admitted
 "as Members of your Society, but such
 "as are deemed to be truly religious,
 "and well-affected to his Majesty King
 "George" — Unless this rule also be
 inviolably observed, You cannot well
 expect to meet with success; for, except
 the Members concerned be men of Re-
 ligion, it may with too much propriety
 be objected, *Thou that makest thy boast
 of the Law, thro' breaking of the Law
 dishonourest thou God?* And as for Loy-
 alty to the King; This rests upon the
 same foundation with our duty to God:
 for the Apostle, after having told us to
fear God, immediately subjoins this com-
 mand also, *Honour the King*. And we
 indeed of this happy Nation have pecu-
 liar reason to bless God, for having
 placed on the Throne of these Kingdoms
 a Prince to whom not Conscience only,
 but Inclination also must lead us to pay
 a dutiful regard: For if a zealous main-
 taining of the *Protestant* Religion; If a
 tender concern for the rights and liberties
 of his people; If the due exercise of
 Justice, Mercy, Moderation, and Cle-
 mency

mency can excite our regard, surely we can never be wanting in honour to the Person, and in dutiful submission to the Authority of our present Sovereign. Your *eleventh* Rule directs, that “ before any “ Offender is prosecuted, he be reasoned “ with and warned, to prevent, if possible, the necessity of prosecution” — The force and propriety of this rule likewise evidently appears : for both *Reason* and *Religion* teach us to be merciful ; And where ever mild and gentle means will avail to correct the Offender, there never to make use of such as are harsh and corrosive.

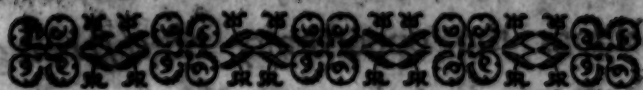
There is still one thing farther, set forth in your *printed Declaration*, that I beg leave to take notice of as what cannot but afford a real satisfaction to all who wish well to your Undertaking— which is this, that in those very cases, where you cannot, without a manifest injury to the Cause of Religion, forbear to prosecute the *obstinate* Offender, you do not then “ make any property of “ the conviction-money, either for your “ own private use, or for the use of the “ Society”

“ Society’—For by this means you will provide, as far as lies in your power, that *your good be not evil spoken of*, or your zeal for serving the cause of Religion suspected to arise from a motive of serving yourselves. May you always be thus minded; May you ever act with a single eye to the glory of God, and the welfare of your Fellow-creatures; And may the Work of the LORD prosper yet more abundantly in your hands! *Finally, Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; If there be any Virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things: And the God of peace shall be with you.*

F I N I S.

[31]
"Society."—For by this means you will
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And the God of peace shall be with you.

F I N I S .



ADVERTISEMENT.

SEVERAL having been deterred from engaging in this good design from the disreputation which ignorance and malice has affixed to the necessary work of giving *Informations*. We cannot better obviate this objection, than by observing in the words of the late *Ld. Bp. of Chichester*,

“ That Almighty G o d expects that
 “ his honour should be righted, and his
 “ justice vindicated amongst men by the
 “ making of good laws, and the vi-
 “ gorous execution of them. And pri-
 “ vate persons may *observe, reprove, dis-*
 “ *cover* and *complain* as occasion shall
 “ require ; and indeed *without this* little
 “ good is to be done ; because those that

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“ have

“ have the authority to punish evils, have
 “ seldom the opportunity of *observing*
 “ them : so that the work of reformation
 “ depends as much upon the *due Infor-*
 “ *mation*, as upon the due execution of
 “ the laws. And in this case to be called
 “ an *Informer* will be so far from mak-
 “ ing any man Odious, in the judgment
 “ of sober persons, that it will tend to
 “ his Honour ; while he makes it appear
 “ by an unblamable behaviour that he
 “ doth it purely for the glory of God,
 “ and the good of mankind.”

The former Society for Reformation
 of Manners, was set on foot, Anno
 1695.

The present Society began, or rather
 revived, in August 1757.

Since that time, upwards of Six Thou-
 sand persons have been brought to justice
 for

for divers wilful and habitual offences,
particularly for

The Profanation of the Lord's Day,
Profane Cursing and Swearing,
Unlawful Gaming, and for
Keeping Lewd and Disorderly Houses:

In conjunction with the unpleasant work of carrying on prosecutions, they have distributed about Twelve Thousand books of Instructions and Disuasives from vice and profaneness, with thirty thousand extracts of acts of parliament, and printed notices, to offenders, in order to prevent, if possible, the necessity of giving informations.

The expences of the society, to this time, amount to Two Hundred and Twenty Pounds.

Justice-Hall, Old-Bailey,
August 1760,
Where the Society meet every
Monday Evening.

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